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Testimony
September 17, 2008
Mrs. Kathleen Witcher, member, Education Committee NAACP

It is commendable that the New Jersey Department of Education would take on the great task of making education reforms tailored to advancing academic achievement for the state's public high schools.

It is my hope as a retired educator and a teacher in Newark's public schools for more than three decades that all school children will be afforded thorough and efficient education and that there will be mandated programs particularly those which are proven to be effective in place to allow students to reach their highest potentials in both learning and social growth. These are youngsters who must be prepared to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

My own view of the proposed HS Redesign program and the plans to implement the programs suggested leaves me with many reservations. I am requesting that a further indepth look be made to examine how well implementations of this reform can be made.

One consideration is for the lack of staff at both the local district level and at the county superintendent's office to make district plans within the time frames given as well as the capacity to monitor the same.

Another concern and it is a deep impact to districts already experiencing lack of funding as per the School Reform Act of 2008, the new school funding formula, the concern is for the provisions to make staff development, facilities, learning environments, materials and services necessary to the school districts in order to make this HS Redesign plan work. An example, many, many schools lack laboratories and the supplies necessary for implementing the science programs.

I also see no provisions by the Department of Education to provide remediation and accommodations for all children while promising to ensure all children /individual groups an opportunity to plot their career courses, to use portfolios, to experience job training and preparation and other requirements of the plan.

Further, the high stakes testing seems to be pushed to precede when and if the local school districts can rush to place curricula reform before jumping into testing. It is well to push for academic achievement, however, given the kinds of learning difficulties, and the kinds of reforms needed for schools, particularly our urban schools, it seems ill planned to implement a plan that will necessarily cast our students deeper into failure.

I encourage this Board to do a more indepth and definitive look into the HS Redesign plan prior to its passage.

K. Witcher
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